

A teenager who grew up in foster care has dedicated himself to supporting children and young people across the North East.

Brandon Robertson lives with his foster parents in North Tyneside and has recently been appointed as an ambassador for the North East Regional Children in Care Council.

The bubbly and determined 18-year-old has been going out of his way to help others since an early age. At 14, he started volunteering at a charity shop run by the Children's Society every day after school.

He now uses his experience growing up in foster care to advocate for looked after children in North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead.

"I've been in the care system since I was 11 and it was my social worker who put me up for this job," said Brandon.

"I've worked with the Children in Care Council for quite a while, so I've had experience with a lot of young people in the care system and I thought, because I know so many of them, why not put myself up for being an ambassador for the entire lot.

"It is a big commitment to do this role alongside my A-Levels.

"I go out and meet all the young people in each of the Children in Care Councils from the local authorities and get their collective views on certain things. Then I take that information back to the local authorities.

"My experience gives me the advantage of seeing both perspectives and I can jump back and forth between what the adults can understand and what the young people can understand.

"I also do fostering assessments which involves visiting potential carers at home, asking them a few questions and getting a feel for who they are. Then I write a report for the parenting board.

"It's very informal, just three simple questions: Why do you want to be a foster carer, have you had any experience with young people, and do you have any worries?

"Then I answer questions for them.

"I always say that for foster parents it's about keeping an open mind and learning on the job.

"They need to have the space to welcome someone into their home, the capability to learn on the job, have an open mind and give the young person space when it's necessary - especially when they first move in.

"I've had two placements. The first one didn't work out because it just wasn't the right fit but I've been in the second placement since I was 11 and I'm still living with them at 18. I'm moving out in September though and I feel very strange about it.

“They’re definitely like my parents now.

“On Saturday it was my dad’s 60th and the place was filled with people who they’d looked after down the years. Everyone who walked in...my partner asked who they were and I’d say ‘he’s my brother’. And the other 40 people? They’re all my brothers.

“You end up with a very big family unit - my real family, my foster family, and my extended family.

Brandon’s ambition is to work in the media and he has received an unconditional offer to study media at York St John University.

He chose York because he loves the city and it’s only an hour away by train but it will be a wrench to leave his foster parents.

“My foster parents knew they could help, so they did, and they’re still doing it. As soon as one child leaves they have another one within a few weeks but I’m the last one. They’ll retire when I move on in September.”

Brandon’s selfless actions have seen him receive a Star Award from the North Tyneside Learning Trust and the Chairman’s Commendation Award for volunteering from North Tyneside Council.